

Sun Tavern shutters

Local landmark could be target
for housing development

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A Duxbury landmark has closed its doors, a victim of the sputtering economy.

The Sun Tavern on Congress Street shut down operations after New Year's Eve, according to restaurant owner John Cowden.

Cowden, a Duxbury resident, and his wife Linda bought the property in September of 2007. The couple has been involved in the restaurant business for years, but always as a general manager or innkeeper. They specialize



The Sun Tavern has been a Duxbury institution for decades. Owners say they may sell the land to another restaurateur or a developer.

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Sun Tavern restaurant is on the market

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in historic properties and have worked in such well-known places as the Publick House in Sturbridge, and the Jared Coffin House on Nantucket. Cowden was the president of the Nantucket Restaurant Association and is currently the innkeeper at the Longfellow Wayside Inn in Sudbury.

"We like places with historic character," he said.

The Cowdens always wanted to own their own restaurant, and when the Sun Tavern was put up for sale, they saw a chance to make the leap.

"It's always been a dream of ours," said Cowden. "We've always wanted something to call our own."

Their ownership of the Sun Tavern started off on the right foot.

"We had a great fall and holiday season," he said.

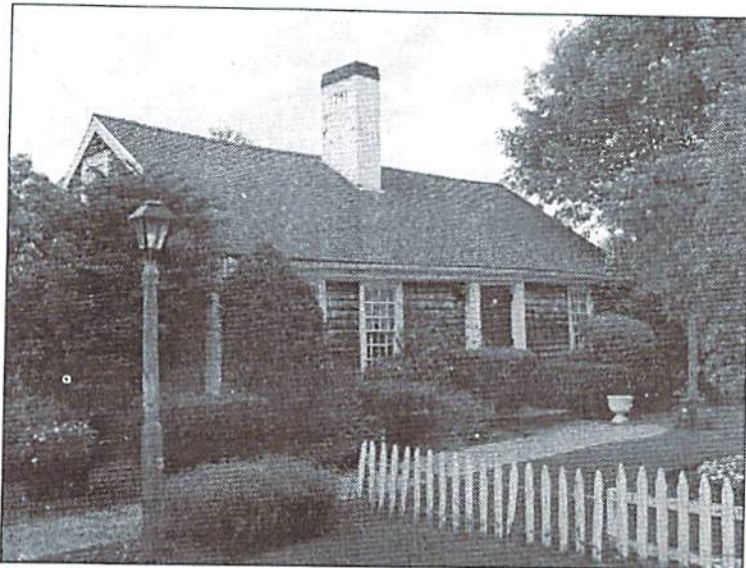
However, when 2008 began, the economy started to go south, and the tavern's business suffered.

"Things started to decline because of the economy," Cowden said.

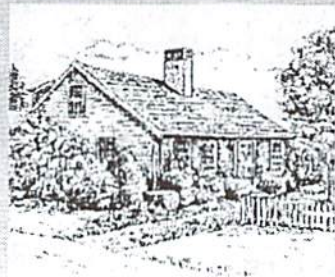
The Sun Tavern has been up for sale for some time, although the restaurant had remained open until the beginning of this year.

"The Sun Tavern is a fine dining restaurant located 3/4 of a mile off of Route 3. A converted antique farmhouse with rustic charm," read an ad for the business on the classified Web site craigslist.com.

"For sale with 5.3 acres of land in a residentially zoned area as a turn-key restaurant or as land for development for \$1,375,000."



An online advertisement describes the Sun Tavern property: "For sale with 5.3 acres of land in a residentially zoned area as a turn-key restaurant or as land for development for \$1,375,000."



The Sun Tavern was housed in an antique cape that was built in 1741 in Duxbury's cranberry bog country. It first became a restaurant in the early 1930s when Mary Hackett bought the property. It was called Mary Hackett's.

The late David Wells acquired the restaurant after Mary Hackett died in a car accident and in 1964 re-named it Fiddler's Green. He operated it much like a British pub and served native vegetables and fish caught in Duxbury Bay. He also owned the Winsor House for a while before taking the Fiddler's name to his Hingham restaurant.

After Wells sold his Duxbury Fiddler's, it became the Chart House and was later operated as the Summer Goose. In 1987 the restaurant was sold again and renamed The Sun Tavern, an appellation shared by several owners.

Although a phone message at the Sun Tavern said the business is closed for the month of January, Cowden said it is unlikely to reopen at all — at least not while he and his wife own it.

"It's doubtful that it will reopen unless somebody buys it," he said.

Although owning a restaurant was always a dream of the couple, Cowden said it had

become economically impossible to keep open.

"At some point you just have to stop the bleeding," he said. "We've decided to close the doors and hope that somebody buys it."

He said there have been some interested buyers, a few looking to keep the tavern a restaurant, but most interested in developing the land.

"It's worth more as real estate than as a restaurant," he said.

He is hopeful that the establishment sells by mid-February.

Community Preservation Committee Chairwoman Holly Morris said she hadn't discussed the property with her board and couldn't say if her committee would be interested in looking at the land for open space. However, she did note that the warrant for this year's Town Meeting has closed, so even if the CPC was interested, the town wouldn't be able to move on buying the property until next year.

"The CPC is really dependent on Town Meeting," she said.

Director of Inspection Services Scott Lambiase said the land is zoned as residential, but the business as a restaurant is grandfathered in.

"Someone can come in and take over what's there," he said.



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circumstances. The building's first owner Lysander Walker, known as the "Last Duxbury Hermit," committed suicide. It was then purchased by Mary Hackett, who opened a small restaurant in the house. The restaurant has since changed owners and names several times. It was previously owned by former Clipper food writer David Wells.

The Sun Tavern was built in 1741 and began its life as a restaurant under mysterious

